

County of Placer

Board of Supervisors

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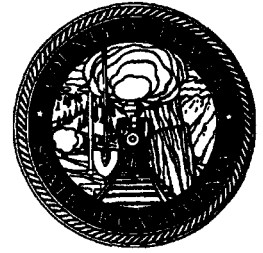
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TO: The Honorable Board of Supervisors
FROM: Thomas M. Miller, County Executive Officer
By: Mary Herdegen, Senior Management Analyst *MH*
DATE: August 22, 2006
SUBJECT: Secure Rural Schools & Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (HR 2389),
FFY 2007-07 Funding

ACTION REQUESTED:

- 1) Authorize public noticing to announce the County's planned use of Secure Rural Schools & Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (HR 2389), Title III discretionary funds in FFY 2006-07 for hazard mitigation and wildfire protection activities costing a total of \$325,000;
- 2) Reiterate your Board's support for reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools & Community Self-Determination Act of 2000.

BACKGROUND:

The Secure Rural Schools & Community Self-Determination Act (HR 2389) was enacted in October 2000 to provide rural counties with a predictable level of funding for schools and roads for federal fiscal years 2001 through 2006, in order to offset the effect of decreased revenues to counties from declining timber harvests and other income generating activities on federal lands. The United States Department of Agriculture is currently working with Congress to enact a one year extension of the program at full funding levels for FFY 2007-08. Future years funding will require new federal legislation.

The Act requires that 15-20% of the funds allocated are to be used for Title II or Title III projects. In May 2005, your Board directed that 20% of the funds be spent on Title III discretionary projects eligible under the Act. For this final-year federal appropriation, County staff recommends that the following hazard mitigation and wildfire protection activities be funded:

- Fire Mitigation Coordinator - \$50,000 (\$35,000 is carryover from FY 05-06)
- Annual Defensible Space Inspections Program - \$35,000
- Shaded Fuel Break Program - \$18,000
- Search and Rescue - \$20,000
- Biomass Project Management - \$100,000
- Biomass Strategic Plan - \$35,000
- Biomass Program Development - \$20,000
- Tahoe Basin Biomass Removal Program - \$21,000
- Biomass Box Program - \$10,000
- Forestry Technical Assistance Coordinator - \$35,000
- Remote Atmospheric Weather Station (RAWS) Project - \$16,000

(A more comprehensive description of the activities and estimated costs is attached.)

Upon authorization by your Board, staff will commence the required 45-day public noticing period, and will return to your Board in October with input from the community, and to request final approval of these expenditures.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no impact to the General Fund as a result of this action. There is adequate anticipated revenue and fund balance in Placer County's Forest Reserve Title III fund to support these activities.

Attachment: Secure Rural Schools & Community Self Determination Act of 2000, FFY 06-07
Recommended Activities and Estimated Costs

Secure Rural Schools & Community Self-Determination Act of 2000
FFY 2006-07 Recommended Activities and Estimated Costs – Placer County
August 22, 2006

PROJECT #1: FIRE MITIGATION COORDINATOR

Issue/Background: In FY 05-06, Placer County hired a Fire Mitigation Coordinator. This action would continue this work in FY 06/07. The Fire Mitigation Coordinator will assist in accomplishing a variety of tasks, some but not all of which, are:

- Coordinate the activities of all Fire Safe Councils;
- Act as the County staff representative to all Placer County Fire Safe Councils;
- Coordinate with the RCD, the Fire Safe Alliance and the Sierra Conservancy;
- Coordinate with other counties to develop funding for fire safe activities;
- Develop and coordinate grant proposals for fire safe activities;
- Assist in implementing components of the Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan; and
- Assist in implementing and monitoring Placer County's fire prevention biomass programs.

Responsible Office: Placer County Office of Emergency Services and Placer County Executive Office

Cost Estimate: \$50,000 (\$35,000 is carryover from FFY 05-06)

Benefit: All communities within Placer County will benefit from the work of the Fire Mitigation Coordinator who will provide a focal point for the many fire prevention/mitigation activities within Placer County and the Sierra Foothills.

PROJECT #2: ANNUAL DEFENSIBLE SPACE INSPECTIONS PROGRAM

Issue/Background: The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) indicates that ensuring defensible space is the single most important action that a homeowner can take to increase wild land fire survivability of homes and structures. Conversely, defensible space helps to protect wild land from the effects of a structure fire, and provides firefighters with a safe place to work while defending a home or structure. Fire fighters can only defend a home if they can do so safely.

Many homeowners are not aware of the requirement to maintain defensible space, especially newcomers moving into the unincorporated County and those formerly from highly urban areas. However, during a wildfire, urban area tactics and coverage is not operationally feasible, and homes' and structures' first line of defense is defensible space that may allow these dwellings to be protected from an approaching wildfire with little to no assistance from firefighters.

Effective January 2005, the State increased the minimum defensible space requirement from 30 to 100 feet in rural areas. Regular inspections then, based on the requirements of California law as specified in Public Resources Code (PRC) 4291 help ensure that homeowners create and maintain that defensible space. An inspection is also an opportunity to educate and motivate homeowners to further improve wild land fire safety even beyond legal requirements.

Whereas CDF has the legislative mandate to perform these inspections, its budget only provides for occasional inspections, despite the many requests by homeowners. Since 1998, PRC 4291 inspections in the Placer County Foothills region have been funded by grants from the Community-Based Wildfire Protection Program, through the California Fire Safe Council and Bureau of Land Management, and through these Title III funds.

Other Alternatives: Taking no action will result in less compliance with defensible space requirements.

Responsible Office: CDF/Placer County Fire Department

Cost Estimate: Total cost estimate - \$30,000. Inspections cost approximately \$10.50 per home or structure for the inspector's time and insurance, mileage, and management oversight. Administrative overhead brings the cost to about \$11.50 per home. Additional costs include those for handout literature, the most important of which is the Homeowner's Checklist (downloadable at http://www.fire.ca.gov/php/education_checklist.php). Color copies of this document cost from \$1.50 to \$2.00 each depending on the number of copies.

Benefit: Increased life safety and reduced property loss. A cost of \$13.00 per home inspected (\$11.50 + \$1.50) is about 0.005 percent of the average Assessor's Roll Value of about \$260,000 per home (which is far below actual replacement value).

PROJECT #2a: ANNUAL DEFENSIBLE SPACE INSPECTIONS PROGRAM (Placer Hills Fire Protection District)

Issue/Background: See above

Other Alternatives: See above

Responsible Office: Placer Hills Fire Protection District

Cost Estimate: Total cost estimate - \$5,000. Cost detail – see above.

Benefit: See above

PROJECT #3: SHADED FUEL BREAK MAINTENANCE

Issue/Background: Several roadside shaded fuel breaks and demonstration fuel breaks were created from 1998 to 2002 using a grant from Proposition 204 funds and other sources. In order for these fuel breaks to continue to be effective, maintenance must be done on a periodic basis. This project funds maintenance on a 36-acre fuel break in the Foresthill area.

Responsible Office: Foresthill Fire Protection District in cooperation with Resource Conservation District

Cost Estimate: \$18,000. This project is primarily on private property. The cost assumes a 50% property owner cost share.

Benefit: This roadside fuel break protects the evacuation route and firefighter access to the Todd Valley area (1,500 homes). These homes are valued at approximately \$391,500,000.

PROJECT #4: SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS ON FEDERAL LANDS

Issue/Background: This action makes \$20,000 available to support Search and Rescue operations on Federal lands. The Placer County Sheriff's Office (PCSO) uses these funds for equipment and personnel costs associated with actual operations.

Responsible Office: Placer County Sheriff Office

Cost Estimate: \$20,000

Benefit: This project helps defray costs allowing PCSO to continue to maintain one of the most successful Search and Rescue Operations in the State.

PROJECT #5: BIOMASS PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Issue/Background: In April 2006, the BOS Authorized the CEO to hire a Biomass Manager to oversee and coordinate Placer County's efforts to determine the feasibility and options for removing flammable wood products from national forest lands and turning those products into economically sustainable forms of energy production or to other beneficial uses.

The Biomass Manager, other County staff, and consultants are working on activities and issues to accomplish BOS direction. Several specific responsibilities and plans have been requested to ensure this program has a positive effect on the protection of rural areas of Placer County from wildfire and improving the economic possibilities from the removal of the valuable woody biomass. These activities will culminate in the development and implementation of a 5-year biomass utilization strategic plan.

Responsible Office: Placer County Executive Office

Cost Estimate: \$100,000

Benefit: The benefit will be a logical, strategic, well-planned program to implement and monitor both fire prevention and biomass utilization programs throughout Placer County.

PROJECT #6: BIOMASS STRATEGIC PLAN SUPPORT

Issue/Background: In order to fully develop the biomass program a 5-year Strategic Plan is required. Technical support from a variety of areas needs to be provided to prepare a comprehensive plan to present to the BOS. The hiring consultants or subject matter experts to assist the Biomass Project Manager and policy team is required to understand and fully encompass the scope of activities needed. With a draft version of this plan anticipated by the end of 2006, and a full plan prepared by the end of 2007, a variety of strategies need to be developed, written and balanced against federal and state regulations, best business practices and thoroughly reviewed before the BOS can commit to a path for success.

Responsible Office: Placer County Executive Office

Cost Estimate: \$35,000

Benefit: The County will be able to fully implement a plan to prevent catastrophic wildfire and support biomass utilization which will be economically feasible for years to come.

PROJECT #7: BIOMASS DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

Issue/Background: The Biomass Program is in the developing stage for Placer County. Additional staff training is needed, as is participation in biomass conferences, working groups and federal/state agency regulatory meetings.

Other Alternatives: County would not be participating in various agency working groups, training and regulatory meetings around the country.

Responsible Office: Placer County Executive Office

Cost Estimate: \$20,000

Benefit: This will allow the Woody Biomass Project Manager & County team to participate in the critical activities to foster the overall program mandate.

PROJECT #8: TAHOE BASIN BIOMASS REMOVAL PROGRAM

Issue/Background: For many years, various agencies and landowners have cleared biomass material and created piles in the Lake Tahoe Basin. In the fall, these piles have been subjected to burning as a means to remove the material and thereby reduce the threat of wildfires. The Biomass Removal Program will be implemented to reduce the amount of burning in the Basin and will be extended to as many potential participants as practical in Placer County. Existing material is currently waiting to be burned in Burton Creek State Park, if another alternative is not available. The U.S. Forest Service and the North Lake Tahoe Fire Safe Council desire to participate in this proposed program. The plan is to chip the woody biomass either into a box (and then to the County's Cabin Creek facility) or directly onto a truck that would haul the material to an existing biomass recycling facility.

This new program is part of an overall effort to remove biomass from Placer County before it either burns or is combined with other waste and sent to the landfill. Eventually, this program will formulate the basis of fuel loads for any potential biomass facilities that are created within 50 to 100 miles of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Other Alternatives: The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency directive is to open burn this type of material, thereby putting particulate matter into the air and water of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Responsible Office: Placer County Executive Office

Cost Estimate: \$21,000

Benefit: The entire Lake Tahoe Basin will benefit from this program by reducing some portion of open burning. The positive effect on air and water quality should be dramatic over time. The goal, over time, is to have this program grow into the main method of biomass material removal for the basin.

PROJECT #9: BIOMASS BOX PROGRAM

Issue/Background: This new program, expected to be implemented in 2006, will support the increased minimum defensible space requirement from 30 to 100 feet in rural areas. The County's Solid Waste Management Division will contract Tahoe Truckee Sierra Disposal Company and Auburn Placer Disposal Company to place biomass boxes in various locations to allow the citizens and businesses of Placer County to place their woody biomass material into the boxes that will then be picked-up, and emptied, on a regular basis.

The intention is to annually provide this type of service to various locations which are susceptible to fire danger in Placer County. The proposed program is part of an overall effort to remove biomass from Placer County before it either burns or is mixed with other waste and sent to the landfill.

Other Alternatives: This material may not be removed from the ground, increasing the potential threat of wild fire; the material could be burned – creating adverse air quality; or it could be combined with regular waste and have to be sorted at the County's land fills.

Responsible Office: Placer County Executive Office

Cost Estimate: \$10,000

Benefit: The citizens and businesses of Placer County will now be provided a low cost option to dispose of the biomass materials which are required to be removed around their buildings and homes. This will increase wildfire protection and should provide a welcome method to assist in reaching the County's recycling goals.

PROJECT #10: FORESTRY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COORDINATOR

Issue/Background: To ensure that the County's Biomass Strategic Plan and wildfire prevention/biomass utilization programs are fully compatible with all forestry guidelines and procedures, the County needs to utilize the services of forestry professional. This technical assistance coordinator will advise the team about existing and future procedures and best practices in dealing with forest habitats and environments. The Forestry Coordinator will be our liaison with the U.S. Forest service, and work closely with the Fire Mitigation Coordinator and the Biomass Manager to ensure that Placer County is following proper procedures. The Forestry Coordinator will assist in developing relationships, technical papers and on-the-ground inspections in the areas of the following:

- Feedstock Procurement
- Comprehensive Energy Audit of Sites
- Biomass Conversion Equipment Due Diligence and Cost Analysis
- Funding Procurement
- Economic and Environmental Assessments, Analysis and Reporting

Other Alternatives: Use current County staffs to work these issues with the USFS and other federal & state agencies to ensure regulations and laws are followed.

Responsible Office: Placer County Executive Office

Cost Estimate: \$33,000

Benefit: The County will be assured that it is following appropriate forestry management guidelines with this vital assistance.

PROJECT #11: REMOTE ATMOSPHERIC WEATHER STATION (RAWS) PROJECT

Issue/Background: For many years, the clearing of dead and dying vegetation, along with the restoration of the forest ecosystem, has led to an increase in use of prescribed burning. At the same time, the population in the Lake Tahoe Basin has continued to grow making it more difficult to conduct prescribed burning without creating smoke impacts. In the last few years, including last fall, smoke impacts from prescribed fires affected both the North and South shores of Lake Tahoe. With the proposed increase in the use of prescribed burning by TRPA, improvements in conducting this type of fuel reduction activity were sought at a joint meeting with burners, regulators, and meteorologists held in May 2006 which was initiated by the Placer County Air Pollution Control District. One of the outcomes of this meeting was a recognized need for better localized meteorological information in order to optimally base burning decisions upon.

This meeting identified the users of meteorological forecasts for the Lake Tahoe Air Basin, the current status of available meteorological information, improvements for aiding future forecasting and the need for improved communication. Short term improvements for future forecasting includes the use of additional meteorological equipment – RAWS – Remote Atmospheric Weather Stations, at locations where there is insufficient weather information.

Once all RAWS have been sited, California North State Operations Fire Weather has agreed to utilize this localized weather data (immediately) in their system to augment prescribed fire weather forecasting. This should provide for better command and control of prescribed fire activities conducted within the Lake Tahoe Air Basin.

Other Alternatives: Continue with the current system of using meteorological information from outside the basin to determine burn dates and times. This typically results in less than ideal burn results and smoke in the basin that lingers for days.

Responsible Office: Placer County Air Pollution Control District

Cost Estimate: \$16,000

Benefit: Once the equipment is under operation, it will be added to the RAWS weather information website, where it can be accessed by meteorological staff for prescribed fire forecasting, wind events, and fire weather. The stations are intended to be 24/7 thus there may be other possible uses not yet identified.